

# 5

Chapter 5

## Guidelines for Site Design & Landscape Design

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## 5.1 Introduction

Site features and landscapes are an important part of Denver’s historic context. Proper treatment of these features helps retain the unique qualities that make Denver special and assists with the preservation and interpretation of historic buildings and districts.

This chapter provides guidelines for site and landscape design that apply to a variety of projects, including:

- The treatment of historic streetscape features such as street trees and furnishings (benches, trash receptacles, etc.) on an individually designated Denver landmark or any property in a historic district
- The treatment of historic landscape features, such as a historic site wall, sloping “Denver Hill” yard, or fence on an individually-designated Denver landmark or any property in a historic district
- The design of new landscape features such as retaining walls on an individually-designated Denver landmark or any property in a historic district
- The location and design of a new or expanded surface parking lot on an individually-designated Denver landmark or any property in a historic district
- The location and design of service and mechanical areas on an individually-designated Denver landmark or any property in a historic district
- Other site and landscape design considerations including landscape screening and the site lighting on historic commercial properties

This chapter begins with general site and landscape guidelines, followed by guidelines that are specific to residential or commercial properties.

### Historic Parkways

Denver has a distinctive system of historic parkways that serve as central organizing corridors and confer special identity to adjacent properties and neighborhoods. Over a dozen of the City’s early parkways are designated under Denver’s City Beautiful Parkway Historic District. Several designated parkways, such as the 7th Avenue and Williams Street Parkways, have not only stand-alone historic value, but are also focal points and character-defining features of residential historic districts. Denver Parks and Recreation regulates development adjacent to parkways, including setback requirements, and design restrictions for buildings, walls and fences, and curb cuts. For more information, contact Denver Parks and Recreation.

### Illustrations Used in this Document

The design guidelines include many photographs and diagrams to illustrate acceptable or unacceptable approaches. The illustrations are provided as examples and are not intended to indicate the only options.

If there appears to be a conflict between the text of the design guidelines and a related illustration, the text shall prevail.

## 5.2 General Principles for Site & Landscape Design

### Intent Statements

- 5A To preserve historic site features that support the character-defining features of historic properties and districts**
- 5B To ensure that new site features maintain and enhance historic character**
- 5C To maintain a strong relationship between buildings and the street through sensitive site design**

### General Design Guidelines for Site & Landscape Design

#### 5.2.1 Retain and restore historic site features.

- Preserve historic landscape and features, such as walkways, fences, site walls, historic stairways and ornamental site features that are character-defining features of the property or historic district.
- Preserve historic stone walkways if feasible. See “Historic Walkways” at right for more information.
- If beyond repair, replace deteriorated historic site features with matching features, including design and materials.
- Retain original open space patterns at the sides and rear of a structure.

#### 5.2.2 Plan new site features to respect the character-defining features of the historic district or individual landmark site.

- When introducing a new site feature or modifying an existing feature, such as a stairway, fence or retaining wall, respect historical patterns in terms of placement, proportions and design compatibility with surrounding historic context.
- When designing a new walkway or path, use colors, styles and finishes similar to those seen in nearby historic walkways.
- Avoid introducing new site features that convey a false sense of history.
- Avoid introducing new readily visible site features, such as curb cuts, which were not historically present on the property, or prevalent in the historic district.
- Minimize impermeable surfaces in front yard landscape areas.
- Use decorative modular pavers, a cellular paving system or recycled historic site materials (such as stone or brick) to minimize the visual impacts of a larger paved surface area.
- Avoid introducing topographic features, such as berms, that were not historically present, especially if other front yard areas on the street do not include similar features.

### Historic Sidewalks

Many of Denver’s original sidewalks are constructed from sandstone quarried along the Dakota Hogback near Lyons, Colorado. Lyons sandstone was also used in some Denver buildings and exported to Midwestern cities. Many of Denver’s Lyons sandstone sidewalks have been replaced with concrete. Those that remain are highly valued for their color, character and durability, and should be preserved.

### Key to Illustration Symbols



**Left:** View of Seventeenth Avenue Parkway, Denver, (Circa 1930s). DPL Digital Collections, Call No. X-23433 **Top Right:** View of Sherman Street in Denver (1882-1900). Jackson, William Henry. DPL Digital Collections, Call No. WHJ-1033. **Bottom Right:** Denver residence (1880-1900). DPL Digital Collections, Call No. X-9436.

## 5.3 Residential Site & Landscape Design

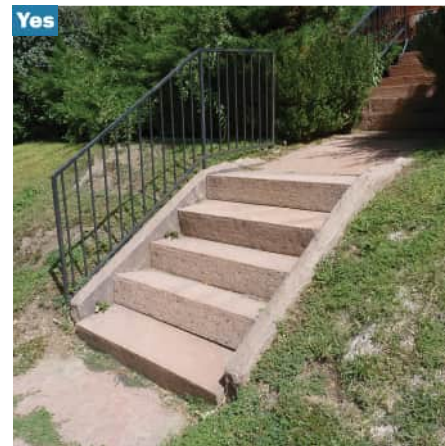
### Intent Statements

- 5D** To preserve the context of a historic building and district by maintaining historic front yard landscape areas
- 5E** To maintain the traditional features, such as topography, that define private yards without obscuring historic properties
- 5F** To ensure that new front yard features maintain and enhance the character of historic properties and districts

### General Guidelines for Residential Site & Landscape Design

#### 5.3.1 Maintain the character of a “Denver Hill” sloping front yard area when it is a character-defining feature of an individual landmark site.

- a. Preserve the character of a “Denver Hill” sloping front yard area where it is a character-defining feature of the individual landmark site. See “Historic Background & Treatment Strategies for the “Denver Hill”” on page 101 for more information.
- b. Where the slope is unstable, use plant materials or subterranean retaining walls to stabilize the slope, whenever possible.



**Left:** South Williams Street Bungalows, Denver (1910-1920). DPL Digital Collections, Call No. X-22051. **Top Right:** Denver Hill. **Middle Right:** Home of James D. Whitmore on Washington Street, Denver (1893-1910). DPL Digital Collections, Call No. C-197. **Bottom Right:** A.G. Dingley residence at 1241 Oneida Street, Denver. DPL Digital Collections, Call No. X-26437.

### Guidelines for Fences & Walls

#### 5.3.2 Where they are part of the historic context, preserve and repair historic front yard and street facing fences, masonry site walls and retaining walls.

- a. Replace only those portions of an original fence, site wall or retaining wall that are deteriorated.
- b. Preserve the character of the original mortar joints when repointing an original masonry site wall or retaining wall.
- c. Preserve an original wire fence when it is a character defining-feature of the historic district (a new chain link fence is not allowed).

#### 5.3.3 Design a new front yard fence to minimize impacts on the historic context.

- a. Design a new front yard fence to be simple, open, and low (unless taller fences are typical of the historic district or surrounding historic context). The maximum front yard fence height should be 48” or less.
- b. Use compatible but simplified (less ornate) versions of historic fences and walls present in the historic district or in the surrounding historic context.
- c. Use historic fence and wall materials present in the historic district or in the surrounding historic context. Do not use vinyl or other nontraditional fence materials.
- d. Do not install a new chain link fence in the front yard (an existing chain link fence should be preserved when it is a character-defining feature of the district).
- e. Do not install opaque fencing of any kind. A fence should be more than 50% open.

#### 5.3.4 Locate a rear-yard fence consistent with historical patterns of the property and surrounding historic district.

- a. Locate a rear-yard fence return behind the front corner of a historic primary structure.
- b. Use rear-yard fence types and materials traditionally found in the historic context, such as simple iron or wooden solid- or open-picket fences. Rear-yard fences may be vertically or horizontally oriented. Only use stone, brick, or a stucco wall if it is compatible with the historic property and surrounding historic context.
- c. Design new fences to be simple, a traditional height, and designed to blend with the historic building and surrounding historic context.
- d. Locate a rear-yard fence along traditional lot lines. If a non-traditional fence, such as a dog run, is proposed, locate in a way as to be concealed from public view.



### Denver Zoning Code Fence and Wall Standards

Article 10 of the Denver Zoning Code sets forth base standards for the location and height of new fences and walls in front and side yard areas. The Design Guidelines promote maintenance of historic fences and walls, and provide strategies for the compatible design of new fences.

### Front Yard vs. Rear Yard

Article 10 of the Denver Zoning Code defines the front yard as the area in front of the primary street-facing facade. The primary street-facing facade refers to the building wall that faces the primary street. In many cases the wall is where the building’s front door is located. The rear yard is defined as the area behind the primary street-facing facade.



**Left:** Gross Family House in Elyria-Swansea, Denver (1890). DPL Digital Collections, Call No. WH1875. **Top Right:** Photo of Curtis Park street scene. **Bottom Right:** 1080 Clarkson Street, Denver (1898-1910). Collier, Joseph. DPL Digital Collections, Call No. C-122.



**Top, Middle & Bottom:** Examples of retaining walls commonly found within Denver historic districts.

## Guidelines for New Retaining Walls

**5.3.5** At an individual landmark site, locate a retaining wall along street fronts or in places where retaining walls are traditionally located only when the “Denver Hill” is not a character-defining feature of the site.

- Design a new retaining wall to help stabilize the grade and to minimize impacts on the historic site. The retaining wall may be a low kick wall up to one foot in height, or a terraced retaining wall.
- Use retaining wall materials that are traditionally used on historic sites of a similar style or era of construction. Use brick or natural stone matching the color and type used at the site, if applicable.
- Masonry retaining walls shall be finished with a cap that projects beyond the face of the retaining wall.
- Use landscape timbers to replace existing, deteriorated landscape timbers.

**5.3.6** At properties in historic districts, design a new retaining wall to help stabilize the grade and to minimize impacts on the historic district.

- Construct a low kick wall up to one foot in height, a terraced retaining wall, or a wall taller than one foot only if there is a landscape buffer between the wall and the sidewalk. (Note: the wall must comply with the Denver Zoning Code and Right-of-Way encroachment rules and regulations.)
- Install a new retaining wall that creates a consistent form along the street front.
- Tie a retaining wall into an adjacent retaining wall or terminate the wall with a shallow return.
- A simple, low, open fence no more than 4'-0" high and more than 50% open may be added to the top of or directly behind a front-yard retaining wall if the fence does not obscure visibility of the primary structure. Masonry piers may be added between major fence sections and at corners if they do not obscure views of the primary structure and are limited to 4'-0" high above grade.
- Use retaining wall materials that are common to the historic district. These materials may include brick, traditional stone or stone veneer matching the color and type of stone found in the surrounding historic context, rectilinear concrete blocks with rough faces, landscape timbers, or smooth or board-form concrete.
- Masonry retaining walls shall be finished with a cap that projects beyond the face of the retaining wall.
- Stucco may be applied to concrete retaining walls only when using a smooth, cementitious stucco at least 7/8" thick, and using a simple color found in the historic context. Stucco over trapezoidal retaining wall blocks or dry-stacked blocks shall be avoided.
- Avoid using curved-face concrete trapezoidal blocks. Modern materials, such as weathering steel or gabion walls, shall be avoided except in industrial contexts.

## 5.4 Commercial/Multifamily Site & Landscape

### Intent Statements

- 5G** To maintain the active, pedestrian friendly character of historic commercial, multifamily and mixed-use streets
- 5H** To minimize the impact of parking areas, new site features, and mechanical equipment on the historic character of commercial, multifamily and mixed-use streets

### Guidelines for Streetscape & Parking

**5.4.1** Use pedestrian-scaled design elements to enhance the historic streetscape.

- Locate street furniture near heavily used pedestrian areas, such as major pedestrian routes, building entrances and outdoor gathering places.
- Design street furniture to complement the character-defining features of the historic district.
- When a new fence and/or retaining wall is needed for security purposes, design a new open-style fence and/or retaining wall to be as low in height as possible and with a simple design to minimize visual impacts. Refer to guidelines 5.3.2-5.3.6 for additional guidance.
- Do not impede a primary pedestrian way with street furniture.
- Plant street trees to enhance historic buildings and offset heat island effects of commercial areas. (Contact the City Forester for specifications on planting trees in hardscape).

**5.4.2** Design a patio or dining area in/adjacent-to the public right-of-way to maintain views of a historic building from the street and sidewalk.

- Use durable materials for patio railings.
- Use simple, low, patio railings.
- Avoid highly decorative patio railings.
- Do not locate walls or other solid enclosures between the sidewalk and a patio or dining area.
- Do not affix umbrella holders or planters to patio railings because they reduce visibility between the sidewalk and building.
- Do not obstruct a sidewalk with an at-grade patio or dining area. See Guideline 4.4.9 on page 89 for more information.

**5.4.3** Locate and access surface parking areas to minimize impacts on the historic streetscape, rhythm of the built environment and disruption to pedestrians.

- Minimize the visual impacts of a surface parking area (note that this is especially important in, and adjacent to, historic residential areas).
- Locate surface parking areas to the side or rear of buildings.
- Provide access to surface parking areas from an alley, when feasible.



### Enhancing the Street Edge

Building and streetscape features should work together to reinforce neighborhood character and enhance the pedestrian experience along the street edge between buildings and the street. Such features include:

- Pedestrian-oriented entries
- Street-facing windows
- Public spaces that are linked to the sidewalk (i.e., patios and courtyards)
- Street trees
- Sidewalks
- Street furniture (lighting, benches, etc.)
- Public art

Note that the Denver Streetscape Design Manual provides the template for enhancements in the street right-of-way.



**Left:** Denver surface parking lot, c.1950-1960; DPL Digital Collections, call no. WH1741-2019-468. **Right:** Maintain the active, pedestrian-friendly, character of historic commercial, multifamily and mixed-use streets.

## Historic Background & Treatment Strategies for the "Denver Hill"

A number of Denver's historic districts feature properties elevated above the street with mostly flat front yards that slope steeply towards the street at the inner edge of the sidewalk. Denver promoted this particular configuration since it allowed rain hitting public sidewalks to drain into the street rather than onto private property, while also providing an attractive planting strip at street level. When present, this "Denver Hill" (also called the "Denver Roll") can be a character-defining feature of a property or historic district.

Several potential treatment strategies for the "Denver Hill" are illustrated below. Maintaining the original grassy slope is preferred. Other treatment strategies may be appropriate where there is variety in the treatment of front yard areas along the same block, or where it is necessary to stabilize the slope.

### Slope Maintained in Original Condition

Retention of the Denver Hill with no alterations to the slope or other features.



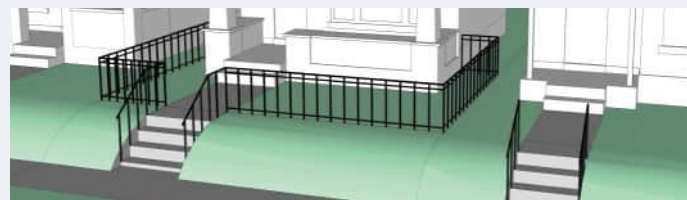
### Stabilizing Plants Replace Grass

Denver Hill stabilized with plantings as an alternative to a retaining wall.



### A Fence at the Top of the Slope

A low, open fence added to the top of the Denver Hill to enclose the front yard.



### Slope Terraced with Retaining Walls

Terraced retaining wall with plantings to soften the impact of the Denver Hill.



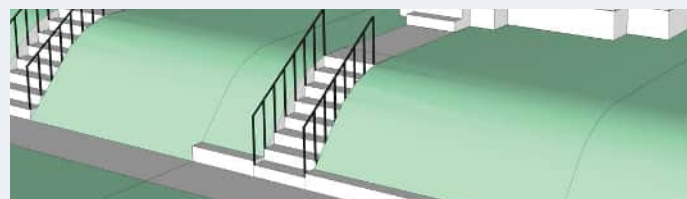
### Lot Leveled with a High Retaining Wall

A retaining wall used to stabilize and level the lot. Do not use this approach on an individual landmark site where the Denver Hill is a character defining features.



### Slope Stabilized by a Low Kick Wall

A low kick wall used at the bottom of the Denver Hill.



## Mechanical, Utility, Security Equipment on a Historic Building

The design guidelines on this page address service areas, security, and ground mounted mechanical or utility equipment. Guidelines for mechanical, utility and security equipment on the exterior of a historic building are provided in Chapter 2.



## Guidelines for Alleys & Service Areas

**5.4.4 Locate and access service areas and ground-mounted mechanical equipment to minimize impacts on the historic streetscape and disruption of the pedestrian environment.**

- Locate service areas and ground-mounted mechanical equipment to the side or rear of buildings.
- Where possible, place a service area or ground-mounted mechanical equipment within a building alcove, especially if it is not located to the side or rear of a building.
- Provide access to service areas from an alley, where present.
- Avoid locating a service area (including trash containers) or mechanical equipment adjacent to residential property or directly against a public sidewalk.

**5.4.5 Minimize the visual impacts of a new service area.**

- Orient a service entrance, waste/compost disposal area or other service area toward alleys or service lanes, and away from public streets and residences.
- Locate a service area to minimize potential noise impacts or other residual effects on nearby properties.
- Screen ground-mounted mechanical equipment.
- Screen a service area with a wall, fence or planting.

**5.4.6 Minimize potential security issues in an alley or parking area.**

- Install vandal-proof security cameras, whenever possible.
- Minimize hidden areas or tight spaces between buildings and service areas.
- Use compatible lighting to improve security in an alley or parking area. See Guideline 5.5.3 on page 104 for more information on compatible lighting.



**Top Left:** View of 'Hop Alley' in Denver, c. 1920-1930, DPL Digital Collections, call no. X-21509 **Left:** Screen ground-mounted mechanical equipment. **Middle:** Locate service areas and ground-mounted equipment to the side or rear of buildings. **Right:** When possible, place a service area or ground mounted mechanical equipment within a building alcove, especially if it is not located to the side or the rear of the building.

## 5.5 Site & Building Lighting

### Intent Statements

- 5I** To minimize the impact of site lighting on historic properties and districts
- 5J** To preserve historic lighting to maintain the original historic ambiance
- 5K** To provide illumination that enhances the historic context and does not overwhelm historic structures

### General Guidelines for Site & Building Lighting

#### 5.5.1 Preserve historic light fixtures.

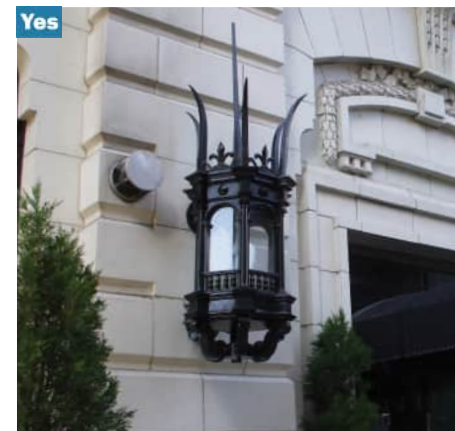
- a. Supplement, rather than remove, historic light fixtures.
- b. Adapt historic light fixtures with better illumination and glare control while maintaining the original physical appearance of the fixture.
- c. Repair and retrofit historic light fixtures whenever possible.
- d. Replace missing light fixtures if sufficient documentation exists.
- e. Where historic fixtures remain and additional lighting is needed, add new fixtures to be subordinate to the historic fixtures in terms of placement, scale, design and illumination.

#### 5.5.2 Coordinate lighting with historic streetscapes, buildings and the surrounding historic context.

- a. Use existing or ambient streetlight or storefront lighting rather than adding new lighting whenever possible. Coordinate storefront lighting along the street whenever possible.
- b. When considering storefront lighting, avoid conflicts with existing streetlights.

### Zoning Requirements for Lighting

In addition to these guidelines, the Denver Zoning Code provides standards for exterior lighting, including requirements to prevent light trespass and glare onto adjacent properties, and to limit light pollution generally. Certain light sources are prohibited in Denver. Refer to Section 10.7 of the Denver Zoning Code for more information.



**Bottom Left:** Historic light fixture in Denver. **Middle:** Historic light fixture in Denver. **Right:** Historic Denver street lamp, c. 1900-1905, DPL Digital Collections, call no. X-18338

### Building Lighting in Denver

In the years following Mayor Speer's 1904 visit to Paris, France, Denver began to artfully light key downtown streets and boulevards as part of his City Beautiful initiative. Many early civic structures in City parks were also highlighted with elegant lighting. No building was more exuberant in its lighting than the 1910 Denver Gas and Electric Building (Insurance Exchange Building) on 15th Street. New banks and office blocks in the early 20th century often included monumental entry light fixtures that matched the scale of the new architecture. More modest commercial buildings were often lit with unobtrusive fixtures, sometimes hidden under a recessed entryway. Residential lighting became more common after the turn of the century. Grand mansions might have wall gates with lights on entry posts or ornamental wall lighting, but most early 20th century residences had unobtrusive porch ceiling lights or pendant fixtures. While incandescent lamps were the single option for night lighting in the early 20th century, neon lights and fluorescent lamps were used for some commercial applications in Denver by the 1930s.



**Left:** Circa 1907-1913 view of Marion Street Parkway DPL Digital Collections, Call No. Z-2069. **Middle:** Night view of the Denver Municipal Auditorium, DPL Digital Collections, Call no. X-23622; **Right:** 16th Street, Denver. DPL Digital Collections, Call no. X-23038.

### Guidelines for Site Lighting

#### 5.5.3 Design site and landscape lighting to be compatible with and subordinate to historic buildings and the surrounding historic context.

- a. Base site lighting designs on historic site or building lighting patterns if they are known.
- b. Scale new site lighting fixtures to the building and to be subordinate to adjacent historic structures.
- c. Use low, shielded, fixtures with down-lighting, or light bollards within landscaping to illuminate pedestrian walkways if needed.
- d. Use modest landscape lighting to illuminate landscape features such as trees or bushes. Landscape lighting must have full cut-off shields to prevent glare to the street and must direct light away from residences.
- e. Use modest site lighting to illuminate building entrances, walkways, and entries into parking areas.
- f. Use fixtures that provide even lighting for a plaza, courtyard or patio area.
- g. Do not install site lighting that conveys a false sense of history, such as faux historic streetlights.
- h. Do not provide greater illumination in parking areas than at building entrances or for pedestrian walkways.

### Guidelines for Building Lighting

#### 5.5.4 Design and install new building light fixtures that are compatible with the surrounding historic context.

- a. Install lighting on residential buildings at the first-floor level only.
- b. Install lighting on civic, commercial, and institutional buildings in areas that will enhance the architecture of the building.
- c. Design and orient light fixtures to provide down-lighting for residential buildings.
- d. Scale new light fixtures to the building (i.e., use monumental light fixtures only on monumental buildings).
- e. Consider using building light fixtures with a contemporary design that are compatible in materials, quality and design with the historic building.
- f. Consider using period reproduction fixtures if they can be matched in style, quality and materials with the historic building, and are subordinate to historic building architecture and features.
- g. Do not introduce fixtures from an earlier or later era that is stylistically inappropriate.
- h. Light fixtures along the alley should be utilitarian in design.
- i. Do not install flood lights or fluorescent tube lighting on street elevations.
- j. Conceal all conduits, raceways, and junction boxes within the building



## Guidelines for Building Lighting (Continued)

### 5.5.5 Use lighting sources and illumination levels that enhance historic building and are appropriate to the significance of the building and surrounding historic context.

- Use illumination with a warm light (3400K to 5000K) which does not distort the color of building materials, finishes, or features.
- Direct architectural lighting or other façade illumination only onto important civic, commercial, and institutional buildings while avoiding illumination of adjacent façades or the sky.
- When designing architectural lighting for civic, commercial, and institutional buildings use fixtures that are hidden beneath architectural features to minimize visual impacts of the fixture.
- Limit the use of colored bulbs or gels, or lighting with changing colors to civic and institutional building for special occasions.



### 5.5.6 Use building illumination that is appropriate to the significance of the building.

- Direct floodlights or other façade illumination only onto important civic buildings while avoiding illumination on adjacent façades or the sky.
- Limit lighting of detached houses to entries and walkways.
- Coordinate security lighting with other building lighting, where possible.
- Use professionals when designing floodlighting for civic buildings to avoid distortion of building features and unnecessary glare.
- When designing architectural lighting for a civic building, use the smallest possible fixtures hidden underneath cornices and parapets to minimize visual impacts to the extent feasible.



### 5.5.7 Minimize negative impacts to a historic building façade when installing lighting.

- Locate and install light features so they may be removed without significant damage to historic building fabric.
- Do not install lighting conduits, junction boxes and wires on primary building façades.



**Left:** Circa 1913 night view of 16th Street. McClure, Louis Charles. DPL Digital Collections, Call No. MCC-1902. **Top Right:** Contemporary light fixture. **Middle Right:** Union Station illumination examples. **Bottom Right:** Exterior night view of illuminated Gas & Electric building. McClure, Louis Charles. DPL Digital Collections, Call No. MCC-1917.